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National Farm to School Act of 2010 (H.R. 5456) Helps Link School Districts to Local Farmers

Washington, DC - Aiming to provide healthy, fresh meals to school children and help boost income for family farmers, Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN), Congressman Tom Latham (R-IA), and Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA) have introduced the National Farm to School Act of 2010 (H.R. 5456) along with 22 original cosponsors. This bipartisan legislation will increase the consumption of fresh, local food in schools across the country by helping to connect school food service providers with local farmers.

"The National Farm to School Act is about making a solid connection between schoolchildren and their parents and small farmers by providing healthier, nutritious food in our schools," said Congresswoman McCollum. "Studies indicate that farm to school programs increase students' average consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by one or more servings a day. Those studies also show that students actually prefer these healthier meals. Schools in St. Paul are already national leaders in establishing a successful farm to school program. This bill will assist schools that want to include locally-grown food into their school lunch programs."

Farm to school programs have taken off in popularity in Minnesota. Sixty-nine school districts now have programs, up from 30 school districts in 2008. This is a Minnesota model that's ready to go nationwide. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan visited Minnesota in November 2009 to recognize our leadership in this national trend.

St. Paul Public Schools alone purchased 110,000 pounds of locally grown produce in just the first six weeks of the 2009-2010 school year - the markets created by school districts can be a big boost to small family farmers. Minnesota students are now eating locally-grown apples and corn on the cob. Other programs also serve potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, bison, and beans.

H.R. 5456 will: authorize a USDA competitive matching grant program of up to \$100,000 to support planning, implementation, and training and technical assistance for communities to implement farm to school programs; direct the USDA to identify existing federal programs that can be used to facilitate participation of small- and medium-sized farmers in farm to school programs; and create an online exchange so that data on farm to school programs is widely available and best practices can be shared nationwide. It addresses both the demand and supply issues central to implementing a successful farm to school program.

Many U.S. schools would like to incorporate fresh, local food into their school meals, however they face start-up funding, planning, implementation, and technical capacity barriers. By offering federal support, school districts and area farmers will have the support they need to develop farm to school programs.

Jean Ronnei, Director of Nutrition & Commercial Services at St. Paul Public Schools, said, "We believe that Farm to School is a great way to introduce kids to healthy foods and eating habits while supporting our neighboring farmers and the local economy. We have benefitted greatly from a foundation grant that helped us expand the use of local, sustainably grown and healthier foods. Many schools nationwide will be able to benefit from this same assistance with the National Farm to School Act. That's good for kids, farmers and our community. "

Jackie Hoch, a member of the Land Stewardship Project and a co-owner of Hoch Orchard in La Crescent, Minn., which provides apples to a local school, said, "We applaud Congresswoman McCollum for introducing this bill that will help farmers access local school markets. Interest and demand in local foods is growing, but the next step, consistent institutional buying of local food, takes more effort and energy to figure out. This federal support for farm to school efforts will plant the seed that could grow and develop into real prosperity for local farmers while delivering real benefits for our nation's children."

Original cosponsors include Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Russ Carnahan (D-MO), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Keith Ellison (D-MN), Al Green (D-TX), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Rush Holt (D-NJ), Steve Kagen (D-WI), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Ron Kind (D-WI), Dave Loebsack (D-IA), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Mike Michaud (D-ME), Dennis Moore (D-KS), Jim Moran (D-VA), Tom Perriello (D-VA), Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Adam Putnam (R-FL), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Heath Shuler (D-NC), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Tim Walz (D-MN).

Congresswoman Betty McCollum serves on the House Appropriations and Budget Committees.

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